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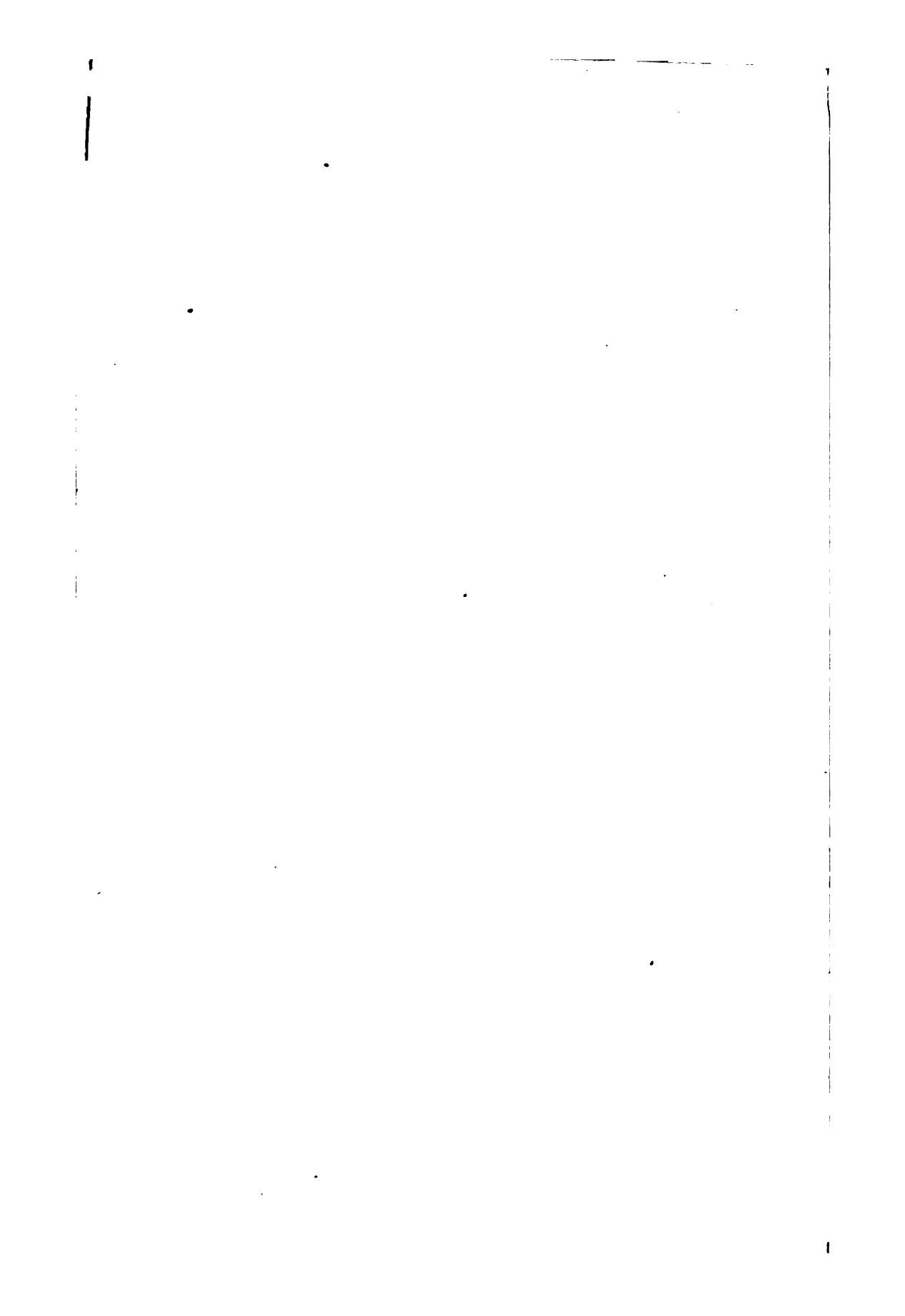
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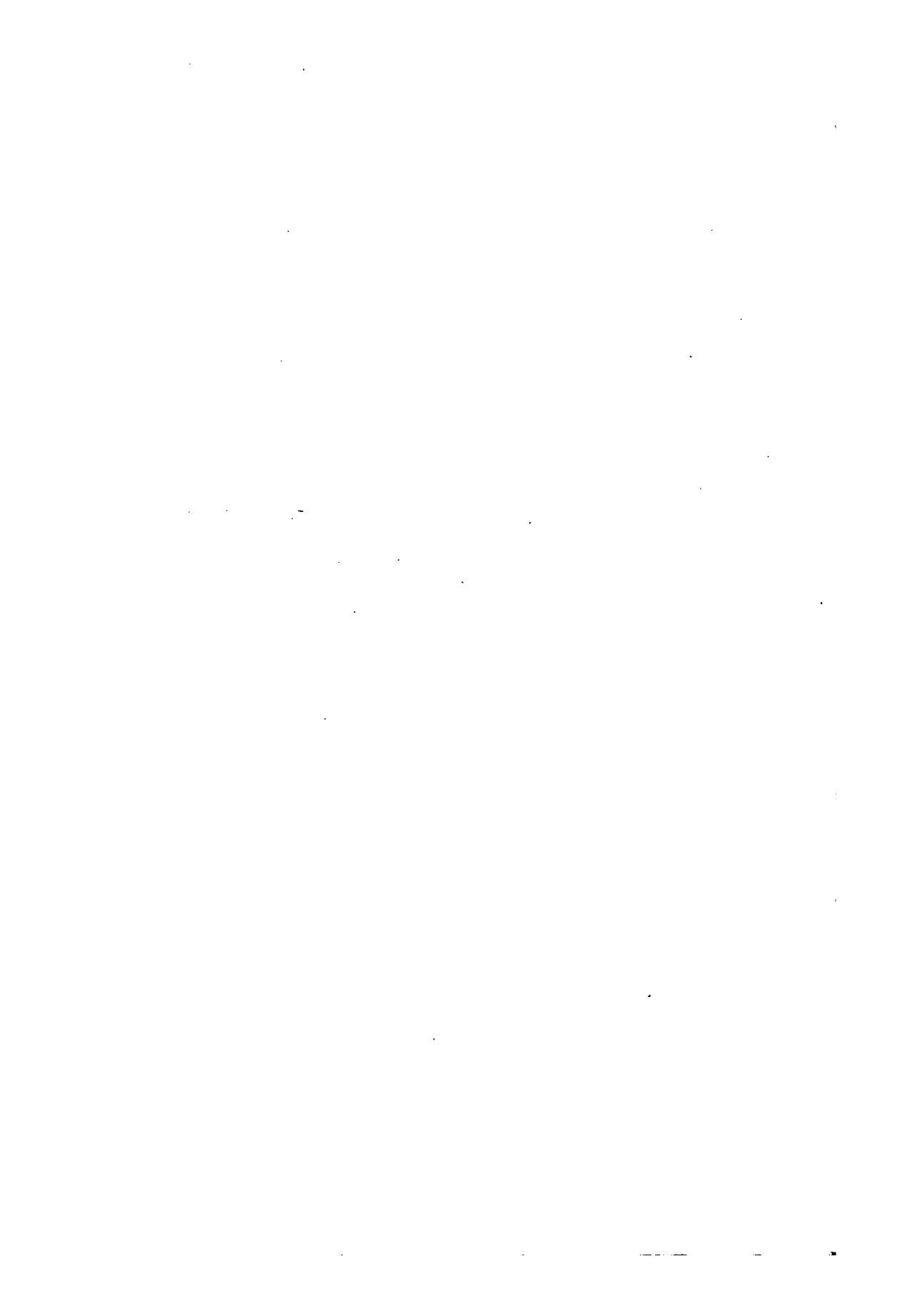


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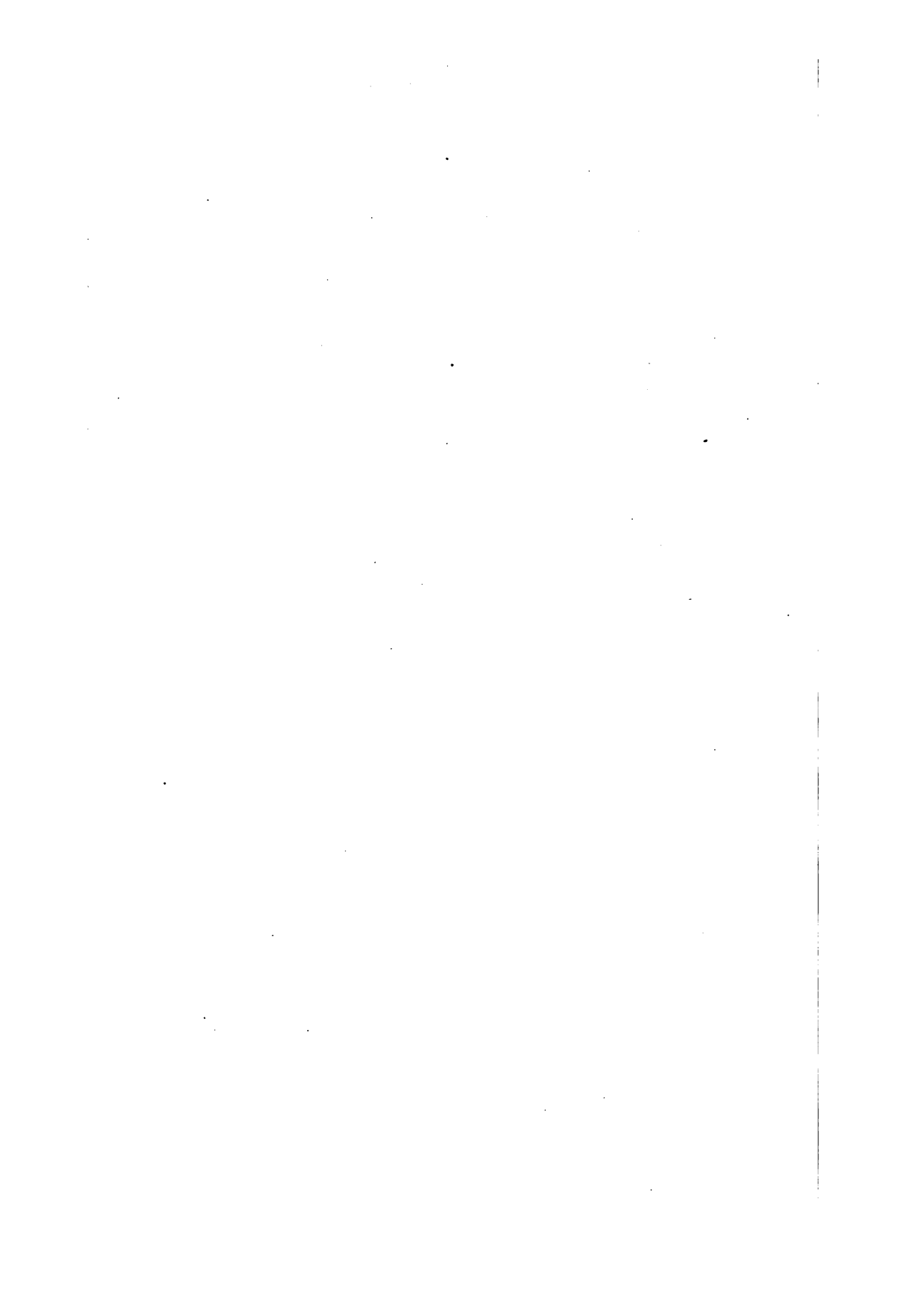












THE STRATFORD RECORDS



A BRIEF HISTORY
OF
THE ANCIENT RECORDS OF
STRATFORD-ON-AVON,

CHIEFLY IN

Reply to a Leading Article

THAT RECENTLY APPEARED IN

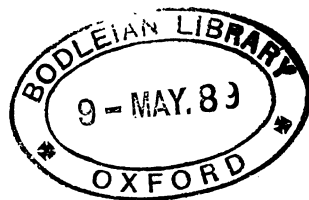
The Stratford-on-Avon Herald.

HAVE I NOT SEEN DWELLERS ON FORM AND FAVOUR
LOSE ALL, AND MORE, BY PAYING TOO MUCH RENT?

BRIGHTON :
PRINTED BY JOHN GEORGE BISHOP.

1884.

2. 5. 1884
60. 9. 3.



PREFACE.

This little history has been elicited under the following circumstances.

Long, long ago the Corporation of Stratford-on-Avon did me the honour to entrust me with the arrangement and calendaring of their old records, a work that I completed to the best of my ability in 1863. During the more than twenty subsequent years not a whisper of complaint was heard respecting either their accessibility or condition, but, on the contrary, the few strangers that visited the record-room expressed themselves gratified by the manner in which they were preserved. A few weeks ago, however, it was represented before the Town Council that some of the most valuable—"invaluable," as they were termed—records were "gradually decaying and losing their value"; words which, if they could be substantiated, would justly render me liable to the imputation of having displayed profound carelessness in the execution of my work, an essential feature of which was, of course, to see that nothing of the kind was likely to occur. Nor has this kind of intimation been restricted to the Council Chamber. The following, for example, is the commencement of a recent leading article in the Stratford-on-Avon Herald, a newspaper which has a large circulation in the town and neighbourhood,—

The Stratford Corporation are in possession of many very interesting records extending from the earliest times,

but it is only recently that the value of these documents has dawned upon the Corporate mind. They were permitted to lie in the muniment-room at the Birthplace unclassified, uncalendared, uncared for, and this indifference to their existence, had it continued, would have led ultimately to their decay, and consequent loss to the town. A little time ago attention was directed to the condition of these records, and the Corporation was prevailed upon to appoint a committee to superintend their classification and calendaring. Mr. Hardy, a gentleman in every way qualified for the work, was entrusted with the task of reducing these records from their chaotic state to something like order, and it is admitted that, so far as the work has proceeded, he has admirably discharged his duty. Of course gentlemen endowed with special talent of this kind require adequate payment for their services, and already Mr. Hardy's account amounts to £180.

The natural inference from all this is, that I have deceived the Corporation in every possible way, and it is an inference which has, to my knowledge, been accepted in more than one quarter. This is not to be wondered at, most of the inhabitants of country towns having no other information on such matters than that which is furnished by the local press. How far the implications of the Stratford Herald are correct will be gathered by the public from the statements that follow.

Then, again, the Stratford Herald, in another recent leader, observes,—

This can be said *from our own knowledge* that Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps has been treated *with the greatest courtesy*

by the Stratford Corporation *and by every individual member of it*; and that, if he thinks this treatment has not been extended to him, his mind has received a particular bias from people whose mental condition renders them incapable of imparting to him the truth.

If the Stratford Herald had here restricted itself to observing that the Corporation, *as a body*, have always treated me with "the greatest courtesy," no one would have been justified in disputing the assertion. I have ever felt grateful to them for the kindness with which they have treated me in their collective capacity, for the consideration with which they have invariably received the perhaps somewhat too numerous suggestions and requests that I have ventured to make, as well as for the very friendly terms in which they have always expressed the several resolutions that they have been generously desirous of passing in my favour. But when the Herald proceeds to observe, from its "own knowledge," that I have been "treated with the greatest courtesy by every individual member" of the Corporation, it has forgotten for the moment certain speeches by one of them that have been reported in its own columns. It is merely sufficient for me to remark that a few extracts from these orations would at once convince the public that a syllabic negative has been accidentally omitted in the description of the treatment to which I have been subjected. I shall be perfectly satis-

fied to rest my case on the reproduction of those speeches ; but until the Stratford Herald accepts this test, it will oblige by not leaving its readers to infer that I am a combative old fellow, who, although overwhelmed by æsthetic amenities, rushes into the town exclaiming, in the words of the Irishman at Donnybrook Fair,—“for Heaven’s sake let somebody fight me.”

Having left the situation I had filled for so many years, that of “the occasional help” to the Corporation, ordinary fairness demanded that the real facts should have been ascertained before it was insinuated that I had been a bad workman and an unreasonable grumbler. The reasons for leaving my place will be thought insufficient only by those who consider it indecorous for a literary domestic to exhibit independent feeling. But however kind masters may be, old servants like to go on quietly in the old grooves, and I am not the only one who has given warning for such matters as being scolded by a new head-gardener for moving a few potted flowers from the conservatory into the garden. Those who have been at the pains to thread the mazes of recent local events will find in this apologue more than one bit of the soul of the licentiate Peter Garcias.

J. O. HALLIWELL-PHILLIPPS.

Hollingbury Copse, Brighton,
December, 1884.

THE RECORDS.

It is about forty years since I was introduced to the Stratford records. They then and for long afterwards mainly consisted of thousands of separate documents which had been collected into boxes and were therein preserved, the ancient ones tangled with the modern in wild confusion.

A considerable number of the documents had been crumpled and slightly mutilated, but nothing like decay had set in, nor were they in any way in a dangerous state. There was, it is true, no end of dust, but that is an object in a record-room as welcome to the eyes of a paleographer as that of drain-pipes in a clay-field is to a farmer. Records are very rarely injured by dust, whilst its presence is an indication of the absence of moisture, their greatest and most dangerous enemy. If they are placed in a damp room, their ultimate destruction is a question of a single generation, and when once fungi have been permitted to take root unchecked for even a very few years, all the efforts of the most skilful binders in the world will be unable to repair the damage. Here there was nothing of the kind.

But although there was no urgency so far as the safety of the records was concerned, they were in an exceedingly inconvenient condition for literary reference, and the town-clerk—the late Mr. W. O. Hunt—was extremely anxious to have them put into thorough working order. We had several discussions on the subject, but most, if not all of them, concluded with one of his favourite speeches,—“Where’s the money to come from?” As the Stratford Herald well remarks, in reference to the engagement of a record-reader, “of course gentlemen endowed with special talent of this kind require adequate payment for their services”; and, in this case, what with the usual fees, travelling and hotel costs, all necessarily extending over a considerable period, the records could not possibly have been put into accessible order and calendared under an expenditure which, as Mr. Hunt said over and over again, the Corporation neither would incur, nor would be justified in incurring, for such a purpose.

I cannot recall the precise date, but some years afterwards I offered to arrange and calendar all the documents from the earliest times to the year 1750 without fee. The offer was at once accepted by the Corporation, who were not, as was expressly stipulated, to be put

to any kind of expense beyond that which was necessary for binding.

With respect to the majority of the records, my voluntary offer was made in Shakespearean interests and in those of my own tastes, so that the Corporation were under little obligations to me beyond those to be met by the indulgent consideration usually extended to honorary workers. The task was to me a most pleasurable one, the work being in itself its own exceeding great reward. The members of the Corporation were also in every way most kind and obliging, scarcely a day passing without one or other looking in to see if I wanted anything to render my working more convenient. But there was none of that fussy interference which would have rendered the whole affair a nuisance instead of a pleasure. They had the sagacity to be aware that a good and useful work was in hand, and, believing that I knew what I was about, had the good sense to let me do it in my own way. There was, moreover, none of that tiresome intrusion of advice-giving in matters which they had never studied. To the best of my recollection the only question ever put to me respecting the interior of a document was by one of the aldermen, a scientific chemist, who, taking up from the table an ancient

demurrer, wished to know which was the right side upwards. This was far better and more sensible of him than attempting to give what must necessarily have been an unsound opinion either on the document itself or on my method of work. It was no more disgrace to my kind friend, the chemist, not being able to decipher an old record than there would have been to me in my owning that I might have poisoned somebody had I made up one of his prescriptions.

The first and most tedious part of my business was to separate the modern and ancient records. When this task had been effected, it appeared that there were no fewer than 5823 separate ancient documents all of which of course were to be arranged and calendared. For reasons that will be presently shown there were 954 of these records which it was not thought expedient to send to the binders. The remaining 4869 records, after each one had been duly numbered and calendared, were confided to Mr. Tuckett, the binder to the British Museum, and who, being in the daily habit of binding manuscripts for the national establishment, was the most efficient person for the task that could have been selected. In Mr. Tuckett's hands every document requiring mending was neatly repaired, and the whole were delivered

to the Corporation substantially bound in 29 volumes ; ever since which time there is not a single document amongst the 4869 that could not, by the aid of the calendar, be readily found in two or three minutes. It follows, therefore, that my implied shortcomings must be restricted to the above-named 954 documents, and now we shall see upon what grounds such implications can be founded.

The 954 unbound documents consist of,—1. The Town Charters.—2. Expired and surrendered leases.—3. A few miscellaneous documents.—4. The unbound records of the Guild. It will be most convenient to speak of each of these divisions in its order.

1. Every lawyer is aware how extremely imprudent it is to disturb in the minutest degree even the external integrity of original title-deeds, and Mr. Hunt specifically excluded the Charters of Incorporation from binding operations. It was his opinion that the miscellaneous ancient documents were valueless for legal purposes, but that the Town Charters partook of a different character. Although many of their provisions had been abrogated by the Municipal Reform Act, there were some important ones that were still in force, and he thought that if intricate legal questions were to arise on the

wording of those charters, as was the case in the seventeenth century in a litigation between the Corporation and the Vicar, it would at all events be advisable, if not essential, that they should be produced before the Court in exactly their original state.

2. Expired and surrendered leases, 719 of which are in the Record Room, are about the least interesting and valuable of all descriptions of records. They are very rarely of any use excepting in the determination of boundaries, and the greater portion of the Stratford collection is exceptionally worthless owing to the descriptions of parcels being generally repeated over and over again in precisely the same terms, even the names of owners of adjoining properties being frequently continued for generations after their respective deaths. Nearly all, if not all, that there can be of positive interest, although the early ones may be occasionally useful for reference, is given in the printed Calendar, pp. 118 to 166; and as all these leases are placed in divisions for each Ward, there is no difficulty in any one accustomed to research finding what may be wanted. They are mostly in exceedingly good condition, and although there are a few that might be the better for repairs, there are none in a state of cumulative

decay. Indentures of this kind are, moreover, more expensive and troublesome to bind than the earlier Guild Records, and the repairing and binding of 119 of the latter have just cost the Corporation somewhere about £50. At the same rate the binding of these 719 leases would have cost £300, and I cannot help thinking that it would have been very thoughtless on my part if, entertaining so strong an opinion as to their very small literary value, I had involved the Corporation in so large an expenditure, or even in a quarter of it, for such an object.

3. About a dozen unbound documents, consisting mainly of rolls, constitutions of local trading companies, &c., all of which were either inconvenient for, or not thought to be worth, binding.

4. The unbound records of the Guild are of a kind that are more easily bound than those last-mentioned, but they are of a class that are seldom enquired after. As to these of Stratford, with the exception of those which relate to the building of the Guild Chapel, there are none of more special interest than that which attaches to thousands of similar guild records in many other towns. There are none of them of the least Shakespeare-biographical value, and they all belong to one of the few classes of the Town

Records that no Shakespearean student would dream of troubling his head about. They would of course be of use to the county topographer, but of none in any of those branches through the inclusion of which the Stratford Records have attained their chief distinction. It is upon a portion, little more than one half, of these unbound guild records that the sum of £180 has recently been expended, viz., £64 by the Corporation and the remainder by the Chairman of the Record Committee, the former sum, however, including the cost of framing the Charters of Incorporation. It is not within my province to criticize the wisdom of those expenditures, but I must be allowed to enter a protest against the Chairman's assumption that my shortcomings have rendered them necessary.

I must also be allowed to protest against the Chairman's accusation that I surrendered my work into the hands of the Corporation, leaving a number of unbound records in a dangerous and perishing condition. I was neither so careless nor so indifferent to the due execution of the trust that had been confided to me. No mildew had set in,—the rarity of consultation put on one side the question of wear and tear,—and whatever repairs might have been thought accept-

able in the luxury of order, there were none that could not have been deferred for an indefinite period without the slightest accruing injury to any of the documents. It must be recollected that I was entrusted with the direction of the binding and repairs, that I was dealing with public money, and that I should not have been justified in involving the Corporation in an expenditure beyond that which was prudently necessary. It was Mr. Hunt's express desire that every reasonable precaution should be taken to limit the cost, and the result was that 4869 records, duly bound, calendared and repaired, were delivered to the Corporation at a considerably smaller outlay than the sum of £180 which has just recently been expended upon the four Town Charters and the 119 records of the Guild.

It is only two or three years ago that the Royal Historical Commission deputed Mr. Jeaffreson, one of the ablest paleographers in the employ of the Government, to inspect the records of Stratford, and the excellence of their then condition is specially alluded to in his Report to the Commission. Having also myself, in the course of my researches, personally examined the ancient records of very nearly

seventy corporate towns in England and Wales, it may not be thought either irrelevant or presumptuous if I venture to express my conviction that the Stratford records, previously to recent operations, were in at least as good a condition as those in any of the towns referred to, and that condition is, in not a few instances, practically unexceptionable.

There is only one piece of neglect of which I have been really guilty. I certainly did forget to mark the unbound records with the numbers given to them in the Calendar, but the inconvenience (if any) that has been created by this oversight must have been very inconsiderable. If any number of persons had wanted to consult the unbound records, the Town Clerk would infallibly have called my attention to the subject, and the defect would have been at once remedied. The identification of records, after a calendar has once been made, is one of the easiest of paleographical tasks, and there could have been no difficulty whatever in the matter.

It only remains to add that the calendar of the records, which I had made for the use of the Corporation, was printed in 1863, without any expense to them, in a thick folio volume, in which considerably over six thousand records are described at sufficient length for ordinary purposes. It is scarcely necessary to observe that, if expense were no object, the descriptions could be so extended that a calendar might be made to occupy ten or even twenty volumes, and if the Stratford Herald can persuade the Chairman of the Record Committee to engage Mr. Hardy for the production of such an extended work, it would deserve and receive the gratitude of all Shakespearean students. But that journal has no right to assert that the records have been "permitted to lie in the muniment-room at the Birth-Place unclassified, uncalendared, uncared for;" and that they were in a condition that necessitated their reduction "from their chaotic state to something like order," statements conveying the implication that I had thoroughly deceived the Corporation, and involving me in the somewhat humiliating necessity of placing upon record a history of my own labours. Perhaps, however, the Stratford Herald is to be commiserated rather than blamed, if, as is of

course possible, it has either been made the victim of a foolish hoax, or if, to make use of the elegant language it has addressed to myself, "its mind has received a particular bias from people whose mental condition renders them incapable of imparting to it the truth."

NOTE.

Page 7, line 11. His (F. O. H.-P's) mind has received a particular bias from people whose mental condition renders them incapable of imparting to him the truth.—Whatever can be the real meaning of this extraordinary paragraph? If the notion is that I have been influenced by baseless gossip, then the Stratford Herald has been falling into the identical error it has had the charity to warn me against, or otherwise so unfounded an insinuation would never have found its way into its columns. I may, however, be wrong in this surmise, for there is so much in the article in which the above paragraph occurs which is of so extremely mysterious a character that, as poor Tom Hood used to say of the middle-cut of salmon, it is impossible to make either head or tail of it.

